

Choosing an agent or broker

Choosing an agent or broker for your insurance needs depends on your own style and preferences. Regardless of whom you select, make sure they are licensed and that their products are approved in Washington state. To check this information, contact the Insurance Commissioner Consumer Hotline at 1-800-562-6900.

Deciding on the right insurance representative

Agents

Are you more comfortable dealing with the same person when you have questions? Do you want to confer regularly on concerns like remodeling — or the need to update your coverage? If so, you probably will prefer the personal touch of an agent. Many individuals and businesses buy their insurance coverage from agents, who represent either specific companies or a number of companies. The agent's job, which is commission based, is to sell you the policies of the company he or she represents. In Washington state, all insurance agents must obtain an agent license from the Office of the Insurance Commissioner.

Direct Writers

A direct writer is an insurance company that sells its policies through salaried employees who are licensed agents and represent that company exclusively. Direct writers offer you the convenience of a single phone call or 24-hour, toll-free service. As a direct writer, the company does not usually pay a commission to agents. In Washington state, all insurance agents who work for direct writers must obtain an agent license from the Office of the Insurance Commissioner.

Brokers

Brokers represent and work for you. Typically, you tell the broker the type of coverage you want and the amount you want to spend. Brokers survey the market and bring back options for you to review. Some individuals and many businesses prefer to buy from a broker, who represents them directly in the marketplace. Many businesses prefer to use brokers because they want an independent source of information that may be able to sample a broader range of coverage available, and put together the best package for specific business and coverage circumstances. Brokers also receive a commission on the sales they arrange. In Washington state, all insurance brokers must obtain a brokers license from the Office of the Insurance Commissioner.

How to select a representative

Check with your friends, neighbors, co-workers, and family. Especially check with people who have had a difficult time with claims or coverage. Find out how their insurance representatives reacted under those circumstances. This will give you an idea about how they will respond to you if you need similar help. In general, you should investigate potential agents or brokers before you decide to buy. For example, at your request, the Office of the Insurance Commissioner will tell you how many complaints have been filed against an agent or broker — and whether they have faced disciplinary action in the past. As a consumer, you have a right to that information.

The Office of the Insurance Commissioner can help you!

If you have any questions or need additional information about your rights as an insurance consumer, call our Insurance Consumer Hotline at

1-800-562-6900

or visit our Web site at

<http://www.insurance.wa.gov/>